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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 000039

SIPDIS
WHA/FO CMC MULLEN, WHA/BSC MDRUCKER, BFRIEDMAN, MDASCHBACH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2035/01/19
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [SNAR](#) [PA](#) [CO](#) [BR](#)
SUBJECT: RELEASE OF KIDNAP VICTIM BOOSTS LUGO ADMINISTRATION

REF: A. ASUNCION 33; B. 09 ASUNCION 677; C. 09 ASUNCION 613

CLASSIFIED BY: Perry Holloway, DCM; REASON: 1.4(B), (C), (D)

¶1. (U) The Paraguayan People's Army (EPP) released wealthy cattle rancher Fidel Zavala Serrati January 18 after 94 days in captivity. EPP members seized Zavala at gunpoint from his rural ranch October 15 (reftel C). To comply with the EPP's three pre-release demands, the Zavala family paid a ransom of USD 550,000, distributed meat to poor communities (reftel A), and urged government security forces to abandon their rescue efforts. The Paraguayan government pledged to capture the perpetrators.

¶2. (C) While the Zavala family maintained discrete contact with elements of the Paraguayan government during the crisis, they did not overtly cooperate with the Paraguayan National Police, and publically opposed government intervention. The family worked closely with Columbian government anti-kidnapping experts brought to Paraguay by President Fernando Lugo's government. Interior Minister Rafael Filizzola mobilized elite forces at his disposal for two security operations designed to capture EPP members. The GOP brought Brazilian technical teams to Paraguay to intercept telephone calls between the EPP and the Zavala family, and to triangulate radio signals to determine the kidnappers' locations.

¶3. (U) Lugo and Filizzola held a press conference near midnight January 18 to praise Zavala's release and announce immediate actions to apprehend those responsible for the kidnapping. Lugo proclaimed "this government is not going to rest until security has been returned to the people." The public and most politicians overwhelmingly praised the outcome and congratulated the government.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Zavala's successful release provides an immediate boost to the beleaguered Lugo administration. Lugo's ability to work well with the Colombians and Brazilians also highlights successful international cooperation. If the Interior Ministry is able to follow-through on promises to apprehend EPP kidnappers in the coming weeks, the Lugo administration may find an opportunity to focus on advancing its agenda after months of bad press, no major achievements, and calls for Lugo's impeachment.
END COMMENT.
HOLLOWAY